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FORGERY BY PHYSICAL TRANSFER

K. S. PURI

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There are numerous problems in document examination. Genuine writings may be denied, forged writings or signatures may be produced, or fraudulent additions or alterations may be made in otherwise genuine documents, writings alleged to be in the handwriting of a particular person may in fact be in the handwriting of another person, and so on.

There is another type of forgery—that of actually transferring a genuine signature from one document to another which is to be forged. This type of forgery is prompted by less labor required and less chance of detection of the author of the forgery. He has in fact done no writing to disclose his identity through his writing characteristics.

This transfer is usually attempted with regard to signatures only to avoid unnecessary risk. Moreover, if a document is signed by a person, it is presumed to have been duly executed by that person. No doubt, execution consists in signing a document written out and read over and understood and does not consist of merely signing a name on a blank sheet of paper. To be executed, a document must be in existence; where there is no document in existence, there can be no execution. Anyway, the ordinary meaning of execution of a document is signing a document as a consenting party thereto.

With this trend of the law, the wise forger does not care to forge the body writing, as there are much greater chances of slips which allow detection than a small signature consisting of a few letters.

There are many ways to make such transfers, but popular among them is the use of a chemical or painting the document lightly with a transparent "sticky solution", and then transferring the signature from one document, by rubbing it from the back on to the sticky portion. In this way, the mirror image of the signature will be obtained on the sticky paper. The process is again repeated on another paper, and the signature will be reversed to appear in the proper form.

Through both the chemical and the "Kabuli process", as it is called in India, the double transfer takes away most of the originality of the strokes. They are usually dull, and there will be very little, if any, presence of the "tracks" in the transferred strokes. Obviously, such normal tracks can only be clear in strokes directly written with a writing instrument, especially with a steel nib.

Moreover, pressure or rubbing required for transfer may not be uniform, or due to lack of uniform chemical reaction, there may be patches in the stroke which are often retouched. Since the ink with which the original signature was written may not be available, the retouchings must have, in these circumstances, been done with another ink though a clever forger may select the one of the same color and shade.

In any event, the retouchings may be there, as the forger is seldom satisfied not to attempt "improvement", and the retouching is usually a first step toward the same. And many a time it is of course essential. For instance, a forger cannot afford to allow a patch or a gap (caused by a pen lift) to remain unfilled. The retouching may escape but never a gap or an uninked patch.

Apart from the absence of tracks or difference in ink, there will be another clear distinction between transferred and the naturally written strokes. In the former, the ink layer will be in between the two chemical or sticky-solution layers, while in the latter, there will be only one layer of the ink stroke.

While a painter artist may like to copy the signature on the strength of his art a photographer artist will prefer to prepare a fine block of genuine signature and then transfer the same directly on the required paper through the medium of an ink (often fluid ink). For uniform pressure, he might utilize the services of a printing press mechanic. This type of transfer, if fairly done, might escape attention, but it will still lack the required flow of a normally written genuine stroke, and it will, no doubt, be detected by an experienced expert.



FIGURE 1

In order to match the ink the letters of the signature were overwritten. The letter at the righthand side of the stamp was traced over by moving the pen from "C" to "B" instead of along the course from "A" to "B". On the left-hand edge of the stamp there is a spreading of ink on the edge of the stamp but no ink on the paper beneath

Some others make a rubber stamp of a signature (through photographic-gelatine-process) and then stamp a signature or use it as outlines for further inking. This type of forgery can also be treated as a mechanically traced forgery and may not be truly within the preview of this article.

Very common and easy method of transfer is to transfer the revenue stamp, if the signature is entirely or mostly on it. This stamp is required with many documents by virtue of law. It is carefully and gently removed from the document and pasted on the paper which is to be converted into the required document. If the signature is entirely on the stamp alone, then there is little difficulty. The forgery is completed by this pasting alone. The bodywriting is either already written or written after the signature, in a vacant space above. Figure 1 is such an example.

It is not as simple as it might seem. Matching the ink is one of the major difficulties, as the earlier ink (employed in the original signature) will usually not be available for writing the new document on which the signature is to be utilized.

Naturally, overwriting is normally done with another ink which is available. It makes double strokes, and the natural flow of the original writing is lost or covered. Sometimes the forger corrects the strokes or moves the pen in his own style of writing. This makes the result more easily detectable.

In Figure 1, the formation of the last letter was a curved one (between A and B), but the forger while overwriting it traced from C to B. The habit of this formation was not shown by the original writer in large number of standard signatures examined in this connection. This is therefore, the habit of writing this letter by the forger and which is written in both these forms.

It is not uncommon that some strokes cross the stamp from the paper or vice-versa. Now when the stamp is removed, the part of such a stroke is left on the original paper, and the rest of it is carried along with the stamp. The terminal or the beginning of the part of such a stroke on the stamp will be so abrupt that it could never be plausible in a normal writing.

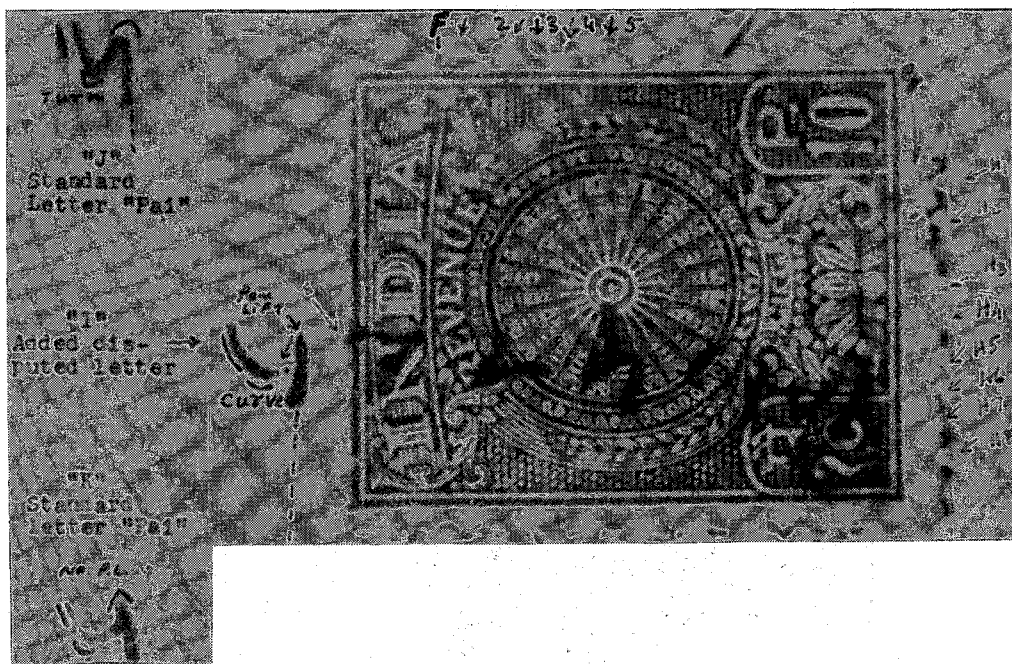


FIGURE 2

There is an abrupt ending of the second letter as it reaches the extreme edge of the stamp at the point indicated by "E". There is no ink whatsoever on the paper beneath the stamp. Further indications of fraud are revealed by the ridges of a thumbprint at "G". The significance of points "F" and "H" are discussed in the text.

Note the pen lift in the first letter of the signature which was placed on the paper adjacent to the stamp by the forger. This is contrary to the continuous form shown in the known writing.

In Figures 1 and 2, at arrow marks D and E, such a terminal and a beginning are respectively present. At D (Figure 1) the stroke extends to the extreme edge of the stamp but does not even microscopically touch the paper. A human hand is not expected to act with this type of mechanical precision. There is even an ink spread at this place, but still it does not proceed on to the paper though it is lower in level. In fact, it must have, but the "touching portion" was left over on the original paper. Similarly, the beginning in Figure 2 is so abrupt that it is highly unnatural. The fact appears to be that the small portion which formed the beginning of this letter was left over on the paper from which the stamp was removed with whatever portion of the signature is contained.

Certain strokes are drawn or written along the "punched edges" of the stamp, thereby inking the edges and the paper between them. Obviously, when a stamp is removed from such a paper, the ink on the edges will go with the stamp while the remaining stroke will remain on the original paper. When such a stamp is placed on another paper, the edges will remain inked while the portion of the

new paper in between them will be blank. Arrow marks F-1 to F-5 in Figure 2 show such a condition of the stamp and the paper.

The author has pointed out in other articles that thumb impressions are used in India as signatures of the illiterates. In Figure 2 faint ridges were found to be present at arrow mark "G" (near right edge). These ridges of an actual or incidental fingerprint do not at all proceed on to the paper, but only remain on the stamp. It appears that a part of them must have been on the paper, but that part remained on the original document from which this revenue stamp was removed.

An original revenue stamp contains a dried adhesive on its back for easy pasting by wetting. Some people still use gum or glue for pasting. Such a stamp, when removed from the original paper, may bring with it some fibers of the original paper. These fibers will not microscopically match with that of the stamp or that of the new paper. Such evidence was found along the perforations marked H in Figure 2, and shows that the stamp must have been removed from another paper before being pasted here.

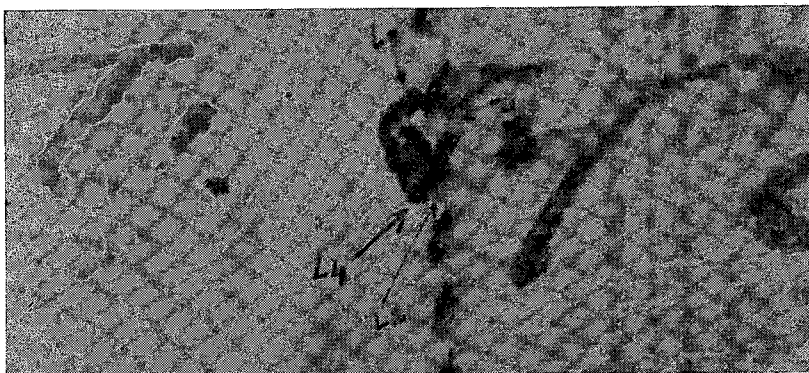


FIGURE 3

A magnified "Bai" reveals a gap in the original oval between "L-1" and "L-2". There is a difference in ink between the writing on the stamp and on the adjacent paper.

Where the extra letters have to be added, the detection is easier when that letter does not agree upon comparison with the standard letters. See the letter marked "I" (Figure 2) which when compared with the standard letters ("J" and "K") differs in its beginning, the curves, the turnings, the pen lifts, the continuity of the staff, slant, and other characteristics.

Where the part of a complicated stroke is to be added, it poses a difficulty, as not only the part has to be added but the continuity as well has to be maintained. In Figure 3, the part of the oval of the first letter "Bai" on the stamp needed to be added between arrow marks "L1" and "L2", but the forger could not fill-in so as to show continuity. Despite his efforts, he added the stroke between "L3" and "L4" (instead of "L1" and "L2"). The disjointed ends could easily have been seen and also the difference in the shade of the added ink. It was further noted that the ink of the added stroke, however, agrees with the ink of the letter on the left side of the signature on the paper.¹

¹ At the request of the author, this case was also examined by the Interpol and the Danish Police. The former (Secretary General M. Sicot) commented that the demonstration was sufficiently clear to carry conviction in a court of law. The latter (Assistant Commissioner F. C. V. Magius) conveyed that they shared the opinion that originally the revenue stamp with the possible genuine signature had been affixed to a completely different document; that the fact that the missing part of the first letter of the signature has

Many documents are folded and sometimes over the revenue stamp as well. When such a stamp is removed and placed on another paper, the fold mark will only be present on the stamp and the corresponding fold may not be in the new paper at all. The remaining part of the fold on the original paper must have been left there. Naturally, this would mean that the revenue stamp did not originally belong to the present document and must have been removed from a folded document.

Folding and unfolding weakens the paper fibres and lessens the resisting power. It also disturbs the polish of the paper. When such a stamp is removed, the pressure affects the folded portion more and may create a slight crack in the "stamp paper". When reaffixing the stamp on another paper, fresh gum has to be applied on the back, and in the process of pressing, the gum creeps through the crack on to the face. It clearly indicates that the crack was also present at the time of affixing the stamp on this document. How unnatural, in normal circumstances?

By careful examination of the documents, in the forgeries of this type, some such defects are bound to be present and when properly presented, they will help in the final decision of the case in the courts of law.

been filled in with ink of a different color, and that the wide fold is seen on the face of the stamp but not on the disputed document itself, must be considered satisfactory evidence.